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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/SPG, AND AF/RSA

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SUBJECT: SUDANESE SEEKING QUIET, PRIVATE DIPLOMATIC TALKS

REF: KHARTOUM 468

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Sudan's top two diplomats in Ethiopia called on the Ambassador to initiate quiet dialogue between our two Embassies on improving bilateral relations in support of the new U.S. Administration. The Sudanese questioned the veracity of USG sources of information about Sudan, and they offered to provide names of Sudanese with a good understanding of American policy as interlocutors. End Summary.

¶2. (C) As part of our ongoing consultations with Arab Ambassadors in Ethiopia, the Ambassador and USAU Political/Economic Chief met on April 7 with Sudanese Ambassador Mohieldin Salim and Deputy Head of Mission Ambassador Akuei Bona Malwal to explore the potential for quiet private talks on improving U.S.-Sudan relations. Ambassador Salim made clear that he had instructions from his Foreign Ministry to make this overture, adding that he was personally optimistic about a warming of relations now that the new U.S. Administration was in office. Addis is now a good venue with the seat of the African Union and the open and regular meetings initiated by the American Ambassador with the Arab Ambassadors. "Psychologically, my people are ready to deliver in this area," he said. His message of optimism echoed that of Sudanese MFA Under Secretary Muttrif Siddiq, who met with Special Envoy for Sudan Major General J. Scott Gration on April 2 (see reftel).

¶3. (C) The Special Envoy's first visit to Sudan has made a good first impression in the GOS, Salim said, referring to the Special Envoy's positive statement upon arrival in Khartoum in which he told the media he was seeking friendship and cooperation from the GOS. While the GOS may have welcomed the Special Envoy's offer of greater engagement, Salim emphasized that the ICC arrest warrant for President Bashir remains "one of the most annoying issues in Sudan." He warned that the arrest warrant will complicate Sudan's planned elections in February 2010.

¶4. (C) Salim questioned where the USG was getting its information about Sudan, saying so-called friends of the United States "have their own interests in Sudan." Salim opined that some U.S. decisions were based on information that is either "false information or misinformation." He singled out the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Egypt as sources that should be checked, but he did not elaborate. The USG should consult with other friends about Sudan, such as Ethiopia, but also the Saudis and Emiratis. "They all know us very well and they can convey messages better," he added.

¶5. (C) He also suggested that the new Administration do a better job than its predecessor in assessing Sudan. He said

the new U.S. President offers a unique opportunity that Sudan did not want to miss. "We are ready to work together for our interests and in the interests of the United States," Salim said. The Sudanese that the USG engaged with from 1958-1964 when General Abboud presided over Sudan are the same Sudanese today, he continued. "Those governing now are not devils."

¶16. (C) Salim proposed that the two embassies provide their good offices to facilitate a dialogue that is quiet, private, and open-minded, and that informs U.S. and Sudanese decision-makers and builds confidence. He said the GOS could provide names of helpful "American-oriented" interlocutors (e.g. former Ambassador to the U.S. Mahdi) "who know how to talk to the other side." Ambassador Malwal, a U.S.-educated diplomat from South Sudan, echoed Salim's sentiments, saying it was time to turn a new page in U.S.-Sudan relations.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador promised to convey this message to Washington and to USUN, and urged the GOS to instruct its Charge in Washington to engage with U.S. officials as well. He reviewed with the Sudanese who will be shaping the Administration's Africa policy, and the vital role certain U.S. Senators and U.S. agency officials play in that regard. The issue of Darfur has been both a domestic and foreign policy issue in the United States, and thus of great interest to Congress. The Ambassador urged the Sudanese to carefully consider the repercussions of their decision to expel NGOs from Darfur as this sends a negative message to Congress and the Administration. The GOS also must be careful not to antagonize UNAMID troop contributors such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, he said. With regard to the SPLM, the Ambassador reminded the Sudanese of the close relationship that exists between the U.S. and the people and government of South Sudan. Both sides agreed that no one wants a return of civil war between North and South.

¶18. (C) Comment: This is not the first time that the USG and the GOS have discussed the possibility of holding quiet talks in Ethiopia with the aim of improving bilateral relations. We will urge Ambassador Salim to furnish the list of "American-oriented" interlocutors to Embassy Khartoum and the USG can assess whether this is a diplomatic channel worth pursuing. It is also possible that the GOS is counting on normalization of relations with the U.S. to relieve some of the political pressure it is facing.

¶19. (C) Comment continued: Embassy Addis and USAU want to emphasize to the Sudanese that we are ready to talk with them mission-to-mission, not government-to-government. Moreover, we defer to Embassy Khartoum and AF/SPG on this overture and the process forward should the AF Bureau consider this an opportunity. We are not the experts and we do not negotiate. Embassy Addis offers its services as facilitator for Washington-based officials to come to Addis to meet with the Sudanese officials. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO